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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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date: May 14, 2020, 11:26 PM
subject: Rav Frand - Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Parshas Behar
Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1118 / #1119 — What Are You (Not) Allowed to Talk About on Shabbos? / Davening in a Rented Movie Theater – Is There A Problem? Good Shabbos!

Yovel Is About Going Back to the Source
In Parshas Behar, following the laws of the Sabbatical year, the Torah says, "You shall count for yourself seven Sabbaths of years, seven years seven times; and the days of the seven Sabbaths of years shall be for you forty-nine years." [Vayikra 25:8] This introduces the laws of the Jubilee (Yovel) year, which are associated with the laws of the Sabbatical (Shmitah) years. Following seven cycles of seven years – on the fiftieth year – a very interesting thing happens. If someone sells his family plot in the Land of Israel, the purchaser is only entitled to keep it until the Yovel year. At Yovel, all family-inherited property returns to the original family who had owned it prior to the sale. Furthermore, even a Hebrew slave who was indentured past his original six-year servitude – which the Torah calls "and he is a slave forever" (l'olam) – goes free on the Yovel year. The pasuk then says, "You shall sound a broken blast on the shofar, in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month; on Yom Kippur you shall sound the shofar throughout your land." [Vayikra 25:9]. The Yovel year is announced with the blowing of the shofar. Even though, strictly speaking, the year begins on Tishrei 1 (Rosh HaShannah), regarding Yovel, the Yovel laws take effect on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year.

Now we all know that the tenth day of the month of Tishrei is Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, the previously-cited pasuk redundantly identifies the start of

the Yovel year both by saying "in the seventh month, on the tenth of the month" and by saying "on Yom Kippur." Rashi on that pasuk questions this redundancy. Rashi answers that this teaches that the blowing of the Shofar for Yovel overrides any associated prohibition of Shabbos or Yom Kippur.

The Maharal, however, asks a very interesting question. If someone listens carefully to the words of the pasuk, the first identifier mentioned is "the seventh month, on the tenth of the month." Only subsequently does it add "on Yom Kippur." Now, let us ask – which of the two identifiers are extra? It would seem that "Yom Kippur," which is the second mentioned identifier is the extra one. Yet, this is not how Rashi articulates his question. Rashi says "From the fact that the pasuk mentions Yom Kippur, do I not understand that we are speaking of the tenth day of the seventh month?" It should be the other way around! The Maharal asks that Rashi should have phrased the question in the reverse – "From the fact that the pasuk states the tenth day of the seventh month, do I not know that this is Yom Kippur?"

Maharal gives two answers. We will only concentrate on the Maharal's second answer, in which he says a beautiful thought.

The Maharal says it is no coincidence that Yovel is related to Yom Kippur. Yovel is not triggered by Rosh HaShannah of the fiftieth year, or Succos of the fiftieth year, or Pesach of the fiftieth year. It is specifically Yom Kippur of the fiftieth year. The Maharal says there is something interrelated between Yom Kippur and Yovel. The connection is thematic. Yovel is all about going back to the source. Things return to the original configuration that they are supposed to be in. The slave who sold himself beyond the specified six-year term, goes free. He goes back to his family. He goes back to where he belongs. The field that was in someone's family for generations but had to be sold out of desperation because of poverty – now that field comes back to where it belongs.

"Everyone who understands the depths of the matter realizes that Yom Kippur and Yovel teach one and the same lesson. Yovel marks the return of everything to its original status. And so too, on Yom Kippur, everyone returns to his original status (of presumed innocence)."

Yes, we may have strayed during the course of the year. We all stray. But Yom Kippur, we go back to the Source. We go back to the Ribono shel Olam. We go back to our pristine relationship with Him. That is why Rashi emphasizes the primary role of Yom Kippur in setting the date of Yovel: "From the fact that it mentions Yom Kippur, would I not realize that we are speaking about the tenth of the seventh month?" Even though it might be mentioned second in the pasuk, it needs to be treated as the primary factor in the setting of the Yovel year because Yovel and Yom Kippur are two sides of the same coin.

You May Treat Your Worker Like a Slave – But Not Your Eved Ivri

The pasuk in Parshas Behar states, "If your brother becomes impoverished with you and is sold to you, you shall not work him with slave labor." [Vayikra 25:39]. If a person falls on hard times and must sell himself as a slave – a halachic status known as Eved Ivri (Hebrew Slave), the owner is prohibited from having him work "the labor of a slave" (avodas eved). Rashi defines the term avodas eved as demeaning labor. This means, that although this person is indeed your slave—he is not salaried, he works for you day and night for six years—nevertheless you are not allowed to ask him to do "demeaning work".

What is the definition of "demeaning work"? Rashi explains this is work which makes it apparent that he is a slave. For example, a person may not ask the slave to carry his towel and laundry into the public bath house. A person is also not allowed to demand of him "Tie my shoes!" (I am too lazy to bend down and do it myself.) Those are two examples of avodas eved, which we are prohibited to ask a Hebrew slave to do.

The Sifra here comments: These laws apply to one's "Hebrew slave", but if someone has a hired worker who is not an eved ivri – an employee who is paid by the hour or paid a salary – he may ask him to do even the most menial of jobs. He can be ordered to shine your shoes, to lace them, to carry your towel and laundry to the bath house – anything!

There is an irony here – the slave is given better treatment by halacha than

the free man! An eved ivri has more rights and privileges than a ben chorin (free man). That is strange! The free man is also a Jew. Just because he is working for a living, we can ask him to scrub the garbage cans?? Seems strange, but this is the halacha.

There is a second observation from Parshas Bechukosai. Among the curses in Parshas Bechukosai is: “Then I too will do this to you; I will assign over you panic, and the wasting away (shachefes), and the fever (kadachas), causing eyes to pine (mechalos einayim) and souls to feel anguish (medivas nefesh); you will sow your seed in vain, and your enemies will eat it.” [Vayikra 26:16]. This is a terrible enumeration of illnesses that will befall us, if we become deserving of the curses mentioned in this parsha. Rashi explains that these plagues – shachefes, kadachas, mechalos einayim, u’medeevos nefesh – represent stages of decline that get progressively worse.

Rashi spells this out: Shachefes (wasting away) is an illness that wears away the flesh. The person is like someone who has been swollen, whose swelling has eased, and whose countenances appears sullen due to the sagging of his flesh. Kadachas (fever) is worse. A person can be sick even to the extent of having Shachefes, but he does not yet have fever. He is not burning up. So, the Torah indicates that the condition will deteriorate until he has fever as well. Then you can have someone who is burning up with fever but he has hopes that he will recover. Therefore, the Torah specifies the next level: mechalos einayim – I give up on myself. Rashi then goes on to say that the final curse, the lowest level, the worst of the worst is yet to come. Until now, the sick person may feel he has no hope, but others yet hold out hope for his recovery. He may have given up on himself, but his friends and family still encourage him: “You’re going to make it!” The final level of descent into hopelessness is medivas nefesh – when the people around you also give up hope!

Let us ask, however, why is that so terrible? Why is it that when your friends are already talking about you in shul – “Aach! There is no hope!” — that seems to be the lowest of the low?

I heard a beautiful talk from the Tolner Rebbe, shlit”a, explaining both these observations of Rashi: Why the Hebrew Slave has to be treated better than the free man, and why it is that people around a sick person giving up hope due to his dire medical condition represents rock bottom hopelessness. The Tolner Rebbe lays out a foundational idea in parenting, in teaching, and in all interpersonal relationships.

The Mishna [Yoma 18a] discusses the Yom Kippur Service of the Kohen Gadol. On the night of Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol reviews the morrow’s order of the service. The senior members of the Beis Din, the Elders, are assigned to go over the Yom Kippur ritual with the Kohen Gadol. They then tell him: Read this over yourself, perhaps you forgot some detail or perhaps you never learned it.

The Talmud asks: I understand that they can suggest “maybe you forgot,” after all, anyone can forget something. But what is the meaning of “Perhaps you never learned it?” Would we appoint someone to be Kohen Gadol if he never learned the proper service of the Day of Atonement? What on earth is he doing in the robes of a High Priest if he never learned the order of the Divine Service for Yom Kippur?

Rav Yosef in the Gemara there answers that we are speaking of the Second Temple era. During the first Bais Hamikdash, the individuals appointed to the position of Kohen Gadol were indeed knowledgeable and righteous. In the time of the second Bais Hamikdash, however, there were cases where the office was a political appointment, which sometimes went to the highest bidder. How could there be a Kohen Gadol who never learned Parshas Achrei Mos (which details the laws of the Yom Kippur Temple Service)? It is someone who bought the job, without having deserved it!

Rav Assi gives an example thereof. There was a wealthy woman named Marta, daughter of Beisus, who brought a large quantity of gold dinarim to King Yannai as a bribe, so that the king would appoint Yehoshua ben Gamla to be the Kohen Gadol. There you have it. That is how you can get a Kohen Gadol who is an ignoramus.

Does the name Yehoshua ben Gamla ring any bells? The Gemara says [Bava Basra 21a] that if it would not have been for Yehoshua ben Gamla, Torah would have been forgotten in Israel! The Gemara praises him extensively. Prior to his time, Torah was transmitted in Israel strictly on a father to son basis. If a person did not have a father, he did not learn Torah. Yehoshua ben Gamla enacted that in every town, there had to be schools and teachers. This way, anyone whose home situation was such that he could not learn from his father, he would learn Torah in school. Eventually, every son was brought to school at age five or six and taught Torah. Universal education was established for Jewish boys throughout Eretz Yisrael through the initiative of this Yehoshua ben Gamla.

Tosfos Yeshanim in Tractate Yoma and the Ritva raise this contradiction: From the Gemara in Yoma, it sounds like Yehoshua ben Gamla was an ignorant man (he acquired the High Priesthood by having someone purchase it for him) while the Gemara in Bava Basra lists him as one of the great men of Israel for having implemented universal education! “Had it not been for him, Torah would have been forgotten from Israel.” They each suggest answers to this question.

The Sefas Emes gives an interesting answer, different from those proposed by the earlier commentaries. Sefas Emes on Tractate Yoma writes as follows: The Gemara [Yoma 18a] derives from the pasuk “The Kohen who is greater than his brethren...” [Vayikra 21:10] “You should make him greater (i.e. – “richer”) (by giving him wealth) from his brethren.” The Sefas Emes says that “make him greater from his brethren” does not mean only giving him financial wealth. It means that his fellow Kohanim should pray for him that he should in fact become spiritually greater than them, a person possessing true leadership qualities. The other Kohanim are commanded to treat the High Priest like a Kohen Gadol regardless of how he came into office. They prayed that he should in fact be the Kohen Gadol. They asked him shaylos (Halachic questions) as if he was the Kohen Gadol.

What was the result of all this treatment by his fellow Kohanim? He in fact became the Kohen Gadol! He became a great person because of the confidence and faith that others invested in him. He had a metamorphosis. He went from being an am ha’aretz (ignoramus) to being Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla, by virtue of the fact that they believed in him and they treated him like a Kohen Gadol.

This tells us that what others say about us, how others feel towards us, others believing in us—has a tremendous impact. With the right treatment, there is no limit to what we can achieve. This answers why the worst of the worst illnesses is not the shachefes, the kadachas; or the mechalos einayim. The worst of the worst is when people around him say “He is a goner.” If they already believe that the patient has a foot in the grave, then that has an impact on him as well. Everybody knows that how a sick person feels about himself can have a profound influence on whether he will get better or not. This is saying, however, that what others feel about the patient can also have a major impact on his prognosis.

Now we can understand that first Rashi as well. Rashi says not to treat the eved ivri like a slave. Rashi defines this as “making him look like he is a slave.” If you want to have him tie your shoes or shine them in the privacy of your own home – that is all well and good. But when you go out in public and this fellow is carrying your gym bag and everyone knows he is an eved, then everyone will look at him like an eved and treat him like an eved. He will then feel like an eved. “I am an eved!”

A Ben Chorin has no such problems of self-esteem. “Listen, I am getting paid for this. This is my job and I get good money for it. I have that sense of confidence. It does not bother me so much what people will say.” But someone who is a slave and it is clear that he is a slave and he is treated like a slave – that is too much for a person to take. The Torah therefore commands: “Do not make him do menial labor like a slave.” [Vayikra 25:39].

The Tolner Rebbe says: When Klal Yisrael left Mitzraim, “Both these (the Jews) and these (the Egyptians) worshipped idols.” Klal Yisrael were in the depths of impurity. They sank to the 49th of the 50 levels of Tumah. Even at

the Splitting of the Sea – a week after the Exodus – still “both these and these worshipped idols.” How could the Ribono shel Olam give them the Torah a mere six weeks later?

Think about it. A fellow becomes a Baal Teshuva. He makes a life-changing decision that he wants to become an observant Jew and learn Torah. What are you going to do? Do you take out Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, Chapter One, Paragraph One and go through the entire Code of Jewish Law with him all the way to the last paragraph of Choshen Mishpat? “I am going to tell you about Shatnez; I am going to tell you about Chadash and Yashan; I am going to tell you about worms in fish; I am going to tell you about everything under the sun!” You cannot do that to a new Baal Teshuva!

And yet, Klal Yisrael went from the level of “they are idolaters” (Trust me, no Baal Teshuva today is on as low a spiritual level as the Jews were in Egypt) to the Revelation at Sinai. The Revelation at Sinai involved all 613 Mitzvos! How could the Almighty do that to them?

The reason He could do it was because He told Moshe Rabbeinu before He gave him the Torah, tell them that “You will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation! These are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel” [Shemos 19:6]. “Tell them in My Name” said the Almighty, “YOU ARE A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS AND A HOLY NATION!” This is a title that the Ribono shel Olam gave to no other people.

If the Ribono shel Olam has that confidence in us, then fine – we are prepared to hear all 613 mitzvos. He believed in them.

That is what I mean when I say this is a lesson not only for the Kohen Gadol and for the eved. It is a lesson for all of us – how we treat our children; how we look at our children; the confidence that we have in our children; or the lack thereof. That can make a profound difference in how they turn out.

The Master of the Universe tells us “You will be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation!” This is the preface for receiving the Torah.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Behar is provided below: A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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subject: Covenant and Conversation

The Power of a Curse (Behar-Bechukotai 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The book of Vayikra draws to a close by outlining the blessings that will follow if the people are faithful to their covenant with God. Then it describes the curses that will befall them if they are not. The general principle is clear. In biblical times, the fate of the nation mirrored the conduct of the nation. If people behaved well, the nation would prosper. If they behaved badly, eventually bad things would happen. That is what the Prophets knew. As Martin Luther King paraphrased it, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” [1] Not always immediately but ultimately, good is rewarded with good, bad with bad.

Our parsha starkly sets out the terms of that equation: if you obey God, there will be rain in its season, the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit; there will be peace. The curses, though, are almost three times as long and much more dramatic in the language they use:

“But if you will not listen to Me and carry out all these commands ... then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength...

I will break your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze... I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted... Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins...

As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them.” (Lev. 26: 14-37)

There is a savage eloquence here. The images are vivid. There is a pulsing rhythm to the verses, as if the harsh fate that would overtake the nation is inexorable, cumulative and accelerating. The effect is intensified by the repeated hammer blows: “If after all this ... if you remain hostile ... if in spite of these things ... if in spite of this.” The word *keri*, key to the whole passage, is repeated seven times. It appears nowhere else in the whole of Tanach. Its meaning is uncertain. It may mean rebelliousness, obstinacy, indifference, hard-heartedness, reluctance or being-left-to-chance. But the basic principle is clear. If you act toward Me with *keri*, says God, I will turn that same attribute against you, and you will be devastated.

It has long been a custom to read the *tochachah*, the curses, both here and in the parallel passage in Devarim 28, in a low voice in the synagogue, which has the effect of robbing them of their terrifying power if said out loud. But they are fearful enough however they are read. And both here and in Devarim, the section on curses is longer and far more graphic than the section on blessings.

This seems to contradict a basic principle of Judaism, that God’s generosity to those who are faithful to Him vastly exceeds His punishment of those who are not. “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands ... He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7). Rashi does the arithmetic: “It follows, therefore, that the measure of reward is greater than the measure of punishment by five hundred to one, for in respect of the measure of good it says: “maintaining love to thousands” (meaning at least two thousand generations), while punishment lasts for at most four generations.

The whole idea contained in the 13 Attributes of Compassion is that God’s love and forgiveness are stronger than His justice and punishment. Why, therefore, are the curses in this week’s parsha so much longer and stronger than the blessings?

The answer is that God loves and forgives, but with the proviso that, when we do wrong, we acknowledge the fact, express remorse, make restitution to those we have harmed, and repent. In the middle of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is the statement, “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished” (Ex. 34:7). God does not forgive the unrepentant sinner, because were He to do so, it would make the world a worse place, not a better one. More people would sin if there were no downside to doing so.

The reason the curses are so dramatic is not because God seeks to punish, but the precise opposite. The Talmud tells us that God weeps when He allows disaster to strike His people: “Woe to Me, that due to their sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple and exiled them [My children] among the nations of the world.” [2] The curses were meant as a warning. They were intended to deter, scare, discourage. They are like a parent warning a young child not to play with electricity. The parent may deliberately intend to scare the child, but he or she does so out of love, not severity.

The classic instance is the book of Jonah. God tells Jonah the Prophet to go to Nineveh and warn the people, “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed.” He does so. The people take him seriously. They repent. God then relents from His threat to destroy the city. Jonah complains to God that He has made him look ridiculous. His prophecy has not come true. Jonah has failed to understand the difference between a prophecy and a prediction. If a

prediction comes true, it has succeeded. If a prophecy comes true, it has failed. The Prophet tells the people what will happen if they fail to change. A prophecy is not a prediction but a warning. It describes a fearful future in order to persuade the people to avert it. That is what the tochachah is.

In their new book, *The Power of Bad*,^[3] John Tierney and Roy Baumeister argue on the basis of substantial scientific evidence, that bad has far more impact on us than good. We pay more attention to bad news than good news. Bad health makes more difference to us than good health. Criticism affects us more than praise. A bad reputation is easier to acquire and harder to lose than a good one.

Humans are designed – “hardwired” – to take notice of and rapidly react to threat. Failing to notice a lion is more dangerous than failing to notice a ripened fruit on a tree. Recognising the kindness of a friend is good and virtuous, but not as significant as ignoring the animosity of an enemy. One traitor can betray an entire nation.

It follows that the stick is a more powerful motivator than the carrot. Fear of the curse is more likely to affect behaviour than desire for the blessing.

Threat of punishment is more effective than promise of reward. Tierney and Baumeister document this over a wide range of cases from education to crime rates. Where there is a clear threat of punishment for bad behaviour, people behave better.

Judaism is a religion of love and forgiveness. But it is also a religion of justice. The punishments in the Torah are there not because God loves to punish, but because He wants us to act well. Imagine a country that had laws but no punishments. Would people keep the law? No. Everyone would choose to be a free-rider, taking advantage of the efforts of others without contributing oneself. Without punishment, there is no effective law, and without law there is no society. The more powerfully one can present the bad, the more likely people are to choose the good. That is why the tochachah is so powerful, dramatic and fear-inducing. The fear of bad is the most powerful motivator of good.

I believe that being warned of the bad helps us to choose the good. Too often we make the wrong choices because we don't think of the consequences.

That's how global warming happened. That's how financial crashes happen. That's how societies lose their solidarity. Too often, people think of today, not the day after tomorrow. The Torah, painting in the most graphic detail what can happen to a nation when it loses its moral and spiritual bearings, is speaking to us in every generation, saying: Beware. Take note. Don't function on autopilot. Once a society begins to fall apart, it is already too late. Avoid the bad. Choose the good. Think long and choose the road that leads to blessings.

Shabbat Shalom

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subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

National Redemption and Private Protection

Rav Kook Torah

Before reciting the evening Amidah, we say the הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ prayer, asking God to watch over us in times of trouble:

“Save us for Your name’s sake.

Shield us and remove from us every enemy, plague, sword, famine, and sorrow.

Remove the adversary from before and behind us.

Shelter us in the shadow of Your wings...

Guard our going out and coming in; grant us life and peace, now and always.”

A beautiful, powerful prayer. But its location in the evening prayers is puzzling. We know that the Sages praised one who recites the Amidah prayer immediately after Birkat Ge'ulah (גאל ישראל), after thanking God for

delivering us from Egyptian slavery. This prayer structure is called semichat ge'ulah le-tefillah.

So why is הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ stuck in the middle, sandwiched between Birkat Ge'ulah and the Amidah?

Expanded Redemption

The Talmud explains that הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ is a continuation of the blessing of redemption. They referred to this as ge'ulah arichta, “extended redemption.” Or perhaps: “expanded redemption.” We need to understand the connection between these two blessings.

An ancient tradition¹ relates that הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ was first recited on the night of Israel's redemption from Egypt. The Hebrew slaves feared the terrible plague killing the firstborn might also strike unworthy individuals among the Jewish people. On that terrifying night, they fervently prayed that they would be protected from every plague, sword, famine, and sorrow - הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ prayer.

If so, both blessings are rooted in the Divine redemption in Egypt. The principal blessing, Birkat Ge'ulah, speaks of our collective deliverance from slavery and oppression. The shorter blessing, הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ, is a personal prayer beseeching God's protection. First recited in Egypt, this private prayer extends the redemption we experienced as a nation in Egypt to all times of need. Together, these blessings comprise ge'ulah arichta.

For Rav Kook, this is a winning combination. Even when we have personal challenges and troubles, we should not ignore the needs of the collective. We still recognize the need to redeem the nation and all of humanity - Birkat Ge'ulah. The Sages stressed that we should bind together Israel's redemption - a milestone in humanity's advance from idolatry and superstition - to our Amidah prayer.

Yet, even as we set our sights on making the world a better place, we may not disregard our personal needs. Even those working for the benefit of the community recite הַשְּׁפִיכֵנוּ, praying for their own physical safety and spiritual welfare.

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Insights Parshas Behar-Bechukosai Iyar 5780

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Chana Necha bas Yaakov. "May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Brotherly Love

If your brother becomes impoverished and his hand falters in your proximity, you shall hold on to him... (25:35)

A puzzling Midrash Tanchuma discusses the concept of having the responsibility to help a poor person. The Midrash states that if we don't help a poor person now, the following year he will need a lot more help (very similar to what Rashi comments on our possuk; see Rashi ad loc). The Midrash ends by saying that if we neglect to fulfill our responsibility to help we are actually robbing the poor.

This Midrash statement requires clarification: Why is it that if we don't help a poor person he will need exponentially more help later? Perhaps we can reasonably assume that he will need twice as much help (last year's shortfall and this year's shortfall), yet Rashi says that not helping immediately will cause the future need to be more than five times the present need. How can this be true?

Additionally, how is not giving charity equal to stealing from the poor? It seems very difficult to equate not giving charity with stealing when one is a sin of omission and the other is a sin of commission.

We find a remarkable Gemara (Brachos 6b) that discusses an enigmatic admonition from the prophet Yeshaya: "What you have stolen from the poor is in your houses" (Yeshaya 3:14). Rashi (Brachos 6b) explains that the Gemara wonders why we are singling out stealing from the poor. After all,

stealing from the rich is also a terrible sin! Additionally, it doesn't even make sense to expend the effort to steal from the poor; how much can one realistically take? (As the famous bank robber Willie Sutton supposedly answered when asked why he robs banks - "because that's where the money is.")

To explain what it means to steal from the poor the Gemara says, "This is referring to a situation where one greets you and you ignore him." Obviously, this is improper, even boorish, behavior; but why do Chazal refer to this as stealing? What in fact did you actually take?

The answer is that you took his self-respect. By ignoring his friendly overture you actually made a very clear statement about what you think of him - that he isn't an entity worthy of a response. You denigrated his very existence. Obviously, this is very painful for anybody to experience, but it is particularly devastating to a poor person who already feels depressed about his situation and his stature.

The possuk in this week's parsha instructs us very explicitly on how we should view a fellow Jew that has fallen on hard times, "If your brother becomes impoverished..." In other words, we have to treat someone who needs our help as we would a blood brother. When a person helps his brother, he does not consider it charity; a person ought to consider it a privilege to be able to help his family because he wants to see them succeed. A child who receives help from his parents isn't made to feel like a charity case. Quite the opposite, he feels love and support, and ultimately validation, from his parents.

When we ignore the needs of a poor person we are taking away his self-esteem, and telling him that he isn't worthy of our help. Destroying a person's self-respect will predictably lead to dire consequences. A person with low self-esteem has no interest in improving his situation because he feels inadequate, incapable, and unworthy of better circumstances. This is why if you don't help a poor person the following year it becomes exponentially worse; destroying his self-esteem creates a devastating downward spiral. Therefore, when we give charity, we must make every effort to ensure that the recipient doesn't feel like a charity case; he must feel that it is our honor to be able to help because we believe in him and respect him. If a person knows that he has a backer who believes in him, he will inevitably "pull himself up by the bootstraps" and improve his own situation. The Torah is teaching us that the antidote to poverty is creating a relationship with someone who needs our help. Ultimately, this validation enables them to help themselves.

Jewish American or American Jew

If you walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them... (26:3)

The second parsha of this week's double parsha Torah reading delves into great detail of the rewards for following the commandments and the absolutely horrific consequences for not doing so. Interestingly, Rashi (ad loc) actually redefines walking in the statutes as being deeply immersed in the study of Torah. Likewise, when the Torah begins to describe the tragic consequences of not listening to Hashem (see 26:14 and Rashi ad loc), Rashi comments that these terrible punishments come as a result of not being deeply immersed in Torah study.

Yet when the Torah explains why all these terrible consequences will eventually befall the Jewish people, the Torah explicitly, and repeatedly, lays the blame on Bnei Yisroel for not keeping the laws of Shemittah (see 26:34-35 ad 26:43). In fact, Rashi himself goes through the calculation of the years of exile to reconcile it exactly with the amount of Shemittah years Bnei Yisroel didn't keep while in Eretz Yisroel, and states that this inexorably led to the expulsion of Bnei Yisroel from Eretz Yisroel (see Rashi 26:35). So why does Rashi feel compelled to cite the sin of not being immersed in Torah study as the key failing that led to the exile of Bnei Yisroel when it seems to contradict what the Torah outright tells us?

As explained in prior editions of INSIGHTS, the key test in leaving Egypt was whether Bnei Yisroel identified themselves as Jews or as Egyptians. This is why they had to place the blood on the doorways of their houses; to

visibly declare that it was a house of proud God fearing Jews. This explains many of the details relating to who left Egypt and who didn't (see INSIGHTS Vol 6, Parshas Bo).

Perhaps the greatest spiritual test in the history of the Jewish people has been that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The clearest example is the ubiquitous adoption by the Jewish community of the surrounding secular culture. A simple but telling proof is the obsession with sports. While our Jewish institutions (shuls, schools, mikvaot, etc.) have to beg people to attend their functions, these very same religious Jews clamor to spend \$4,000 for a seat at a playoff basketball or football game.

Historically, Jewish exile has brought Jews closer to one another and caused them to identify themselves in a distinctly Jewish manner. A prime example of this was the development of a uniquely Jewish language by which to communicate. In European countries there was Yiddish, in the Spanish countries there was Ladino, and in Iran it was a Judaeo-Farsi dialect. In other words, and for a variety of reasons, we chose to culturally identify as Jews. Today, Jews are more comfortable identifying with sports teams. We wear clothes and other memorabilia carrying our "home team" colors and logos. We proudly adorn our children with team jerseys of the local sports' "heroes." Some of us go so far as to obtain significant sports memorabilia and decorate the walls of our homes with it. This odd behavior is unique to the current American (and perhaps western society) exile. Can anyone possibly imagine our great grandparents in Europe wearing a sports jersey of the Polish national team? They would probably look at you cross-eyed and say, "What connection do I have to a couple of crazy goyim kicking a ball down the field like six year olds?"

The entire purpose of Hashem throwing us into exile is to bring us closer as a people; to learn to take care of one another, reinforce within us the unique qualities we have as Jews, and make us appreciate who we are. After all, nothing brings us together more than a mortal enemy and an existential threat. Today we have lost sight of this ideal; is it any wonder it has led to one of the greatest spiritual holocausts in the history of the Jewish people? We are embracing the surrounding non-Jewish cultures and ideals and it is killing us.

This is what Shemittah was supposed to reinforce. While we don't work the fields or harvest the fruits, we are brought closer as a nation, and a familial feeling is developed. Anybody can walk onto anybody else's field and take whatever he needs, as if it was one of their closest relatives property. Just as I would be comfortable walking into my sister's home and opening the refrigerator to see what she had to eat, so too I can pick my neighbors fruit. Shemittah provides a sense of shared space like one big family.

This is also the reason that Shemittah causes all personal loans to be cancelled. After all, if my brother can't pay me back would I really want to pressure him? Would I ever dream of charging my mother interest on a loan? The fact that Bnei Yisroel didn't keep a single Shemittah means that they were estranged from one another. Naturally, the consequence for this lesson not learned is to be exiled and forced to learn how much we need each other. Unfortunately, only by being thrown to the wolves of the nations of the world, where we are constantly hounded for being who we are, do we learn how badly we need one another as Jews.

Rashi is saying that if we had only immersed ourselves in Torah we could have avoided all the pitfalls. That alone would have been enough to establish our unique cultural and familial bond. We would then understand that we are a unified nation; and that would have been the basis on which to build a cohesive and supportive society. As Chazal teach us; the study of Torah builds unity - Talmidei Chachamim bring shalom to the world (Brachos 64b). Had we properly devoted and immersed ourselves in Torah we would have avoided the need for the punishment of exile.

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subject: Behar - Coronavirus and Shemitta
Rabbi Parkoff's Chizuk Letter

Parshas Behar

Mai Inyan Shemitta to Coronavirus

The Purpose of Corona Virus Shutdown: Hashem Controls the World

(Excerpt from a talk by **Rav Yisroel Brog**)

During this period of the corona virus, people are going crazy. Everybody is stuck at home. Their lives have been changed. And people just don't get it. What they don't get is what Rav Don Segal said. Most people think that I'm stuck at home because of the virus. Otherwise I'd be running around the streets.

You're wrong. The reason that there is a virus is that Hashem wants you stuck at home. You know why you're wearing face masks? Because Hashem wants you to cover your mouth. Hashem wants you cover your nose. Hashem wants you to diminish and minimize yourself. Hashem wants you to realize that you're a nobody. You don't have any control over your own life: where you go, how you go, when you go.

You hear crazy stories about police beating up people who are not wearing face masks. Spraying mace in people's faces. It's all from Hashem. Hashem is telling these goyim, don't you get it? How dumb are you? You're in My world. It's Hashem's world, and Hashem wants the goyim off the street. He wants them in their homes. He doesn't want them in any bars. He doesn't want them in any theaters. He doesn't want them in restaurants and night clubs. He doesn't want them in any sports stadiums. That's why Hashem brought the virus.

Everybody looks at it that because of the virus, everything has to be closed down and I'm stuck. It's just the opposite. Hashem wants us stuck, therefore He brought on the virus. We have to give our will up to Hashem. When a person says "I'm frustrated," you know what that means? "I don't like what Hashem is doing to me. And I don't care what Hashem's will is. I'm very bothered by the fact that I had to have Pesach Seder myself. And all my kids couldn't come, or I couldn't go to my kids." Or a person that is frustrated that he had to be separated from his own wife and his own children to go into quarantine because maybe perhaps he has the virus. Or maybe perhaps it was the opposite, his wife had the virus.

We fight the situation. I understand you. That's what you want. But our problem is that we don't accept the will of Hashem. We find that very difficult.

What's wrong if you turn your house into a Beis Hamidrash? What's wrong if you turn your life around and start thinking about your purpose in this world. What's wrong with developing the attitude that whatever I'm subjected to is the will of Hashem. Everybody's fighting. People out there are fighting it, they're demonstrating in front of the mayor's house, in front of the governor's house. They don't get it. They refuse to recognize that this is what Hashem wants.

* * *

This virus couldn't have come at a better time. This week we're reading about the Seventh Year Shemitta. Shemitta was a time when all commerce in Eretz Yisroel shut down. Sounds familiar?

Shemittah Infuses Emunah And Bitachon

And the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and you shall say to them: When you come to the land that I am giving you, the land shall rest a Sabbath to the Lord. (Vayikra 25:1-2)

The Kli Yakar explains that the mitzvah of keeping the Shmitta year was to internalize the middah of emuna and bitachon in Hashem in the hearts of Klal Yisroel. Hakadosh Baruch Hu was concerned that when they finally entered the land, they would get involved in developing the land. As they become more engrossed in farming and their efforts bear success, they would come to forget Hashem and eventually lose their bitachon. They would think that their expertise (the Yiddische Kup) was the source of their accomplishment and that everything is governed by the laws of nature. The

land is theirs and they own it. Therefore, Hashem totally removed them from the natural course of action. Normally a farmer plants for 2 years and leaves the land fallow one year in order to not exhaust its fertility. Hakadosh Baruch Hu told them to plant for 6 straight years and promised that it won't lose its productiveness. Secondly, He promised a miracle within a miracle: after 6 straight years of planting not only would the land not deteriorate, but in the sixth year it would become so fertile it would give forth a crop that would last for 3 years. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the crop would be the same amount as a normal crop, but it would be of such a high quality it would be sufficient to last 3 years.

This is hinted at in the possuk: You may sow your field for six years, and for six years you may prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce, (ibid. 3)

שָׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שְׂדֶךְ וְשָׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כַּרְמְךָ וְאַסְפֹּת אֶת תְּבוּאָתָהּ. You will notice that the word "its produce" – תְּבוּאָתָהּ – has a dot in the "heh" inferring to read the word: "its specific produce." This is hinting that "its normal produce" will be eaten for 3 years! The effect of all these miracles will be that Klal Yisroel will know that I am the real owner of the land and this will bring them to lift their eyes on high to trust in Hashem. This was the reason why the mann descended everyday with only one day's portion. In this way they continuously looked to Hashem to provide their daily sustenance and constantly trust in Him.

"If you will say, what will we eat in the seventh year?" I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year. (25:20,21)

The great Chassidic Rebbe Elimelech in his sefer "Noam Elimelech" (parshas Behar) cites a commentary from his older brother Rebbe Zusha: In parshas Behar the Torah describes the mitzvah of Shemitta. It says, "And if you shall say, what shall we eat in the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our produce. Then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years" (Vayikra 25:20-21). This is a very strange statement. Why did Hashem have to wait for Klal Yisroel to ask, "What are we going to eat?" before giving them the bracha? In other places in the Torah He gives the bracha without being asked.

The answer is that when the Ribono Shel Olam created the world, He created the channels to rain down upon the individual a constant bounty of sustenance. As long as Klal Yisroel do not ask the question "What shall we eat?" they are guaranteed the heavenly blessings in limitless bounty merely from the power of their bitachon. They will be able to eat just a little. The food will be so blessed within them that that little bit will satisfy them and they won't need to bother themselves with cutting the crop and harvesting, etc. (See the commentary of the Siforno). However, if they fall in their emuna and become worried and ask, "What are we going to eat?" they have just locked the windows of Heaven and spoiled the storehouses of bounty. HaKadosh Baruch Hu now has to give them a special bracha, "Then I will command My blessing upon you..." HaKadosh Baruch Hu in His great mercy and loving-kindness will shower down a new bracha. But they have bothered the Ribono Shel Olam to create new blessings. They will have to pay the price with hard work in order to get it.

The author of the Toldos Yaakov Yoseph in his sefer Kesones Pasim (parshas Shemini) quotes the Rambam that if we would have perfect bitachon in HaKadosh Baruch Hu we would merit heavenly mann even today! In parshas Mikeitz he cites the Ba'al Shem Tov who comments on the possuk "One who trusts in Hashem is surrounded by chesed" (Tehillim 32:10). If a person has perfect bitachon in Hashem, then angels come to guard him each step of the way. All the evil forces of the world cannot harm him. The sefer Keser Shem Tov by the Ba'al Shem Tov further states that if one really has bitachon in Hashem, then even if he has been condemned to terrible decrees, they have no influence over him. As it states (Tehillim 125:1) "Those who trust in the Lord shall be like Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but exists for ever."

There is an inspirational mashal, parable, from the Rizhiner Rebbe, which illustrates clearly to the individual who is willing to open his "eyes" and look, how, after all is said and done, it is Hashem Who sustains and provides for our livelihood. A poor man, who earned his meager living via the time-

honored vocation of soliciting charity from whoever would help him, heard of a very wealthy philanthropist who was very generous with his contributions. Indeed, anyone who came to his door left a very happy man. He traveled to the town where this philanthropist lived, but, by mistake, knocked on the door of the town's miser. The poor man requested food. The miser did not identify himself as such and instead said, "I will give you food for work. I need somebody around my house, and I will be happy to reimburse your time." Nu, what could the poor man do? He labored all day. At the end of the day, he asked the man for a meal. The miser had no shame (they never do), and he proceeded to send the poor man next door to the philanthropist. His generous neighbor would provide him with a meal!

This, explains the Rebbe, is the story of earning a livelihood. In the end, we are all sustained by the Almighty. Some of us, regrettably, knock on the wrong door. We turn to various venues which we think will provide for us, but, at the end of the day, it is Hashem Who is supporting us. This is the lesson of Shemittah. It is not about the land. It is about realizing that the land is merely Hashem's vehicle. The support always comes from Above.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim approaches the question from a different perspective. He views the questioner not as one who doubts, but rather, as one who truly believes that Hashem will provide. He is filled with emunah and bitachon. So, why is he questioning? He wonders not if Hashem will provide, but rather, how will He do it? What miracle will Hashem bring forth to sustain him? After all, if there is no agricultural effort, there can be no harvest, and, thus, no food. Hashem replies that He has no need for miracles, and we should not depend on them. The Almighty has sufficient latitude within His control of nature to provide sustenance without going to the next level and sending a miracle. He will bless the sixth year, and it will provide more and better in order to sustain His believers.

Shemittah is more than a lesson in earning a livelihood. It is a primer for life. It is an attitude that a Jew should manifest throughout his life's endeavor.

Gut Shabbos!

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Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Rav Kahana Dvar Torah

BS"D Parashat Behar Bechukotai 5780

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Old is Beautiful

The underlying theme in parashat Behar, according to the Gemara (Kiddushin 20a), is the punishment of the sinner whose life goes from bad to worse but refuses to realize that the cause of his suffering is his continued negative behavior.

Who is there to point out to the sinner the secret of his despair?

Vayikra 19,32:

מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן ויראת מאלהיך אני ה'

Arise in the presence of the aged and admire the elderly and revere your G-d. I am the L-rd.

This term appears often in our sources

יין ישן שדעת זקנים נוחה הימנו

Old wine that provides pleasure for the elderly

Why is the pleasure of old wine associated with the elderly, when there are many young people who enjoy a good glass of old wine?

I suggest:

The elderly are often sidelined to a spectator status after experiencing decades of participation in active life and society. Often depression sets in, with the feeling that their importance has diminished to the extent that they are more a burden to society and family than an asset; their future is behind them. Many are resolved to the feeling that this is the fate of all things old in a world geared to the young, fresh, and new.

The rabbis, in their great wisdom, were revealing an important lesson that is inherent in a glass of old wine. An elderly person sips a glass of old kiddush wine, and it is good and sweet. Suddenly, he realizes that "old" is not necessarily worthless. On the contrary, just as old wine has greater value than freshly produced wine, so too can the elderly perform functions in society which the young are unable to do.

Our Jewish great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers have always been held in high esteem and love for their chachmat chayim (life's wisdom), but much more so in our time. For they perform, effortlessly, what is probably the highest and most eminent function possible. They are the living proof, indeed the only tangible, irrefutable, undeniable proof, for any objective mind, that God exists and that He is a religious Zionist.

The Midrash Tanchuma (parashat Noach) and other sources cite three righteous individuals who saw their former lives destroyed and then rebuilt through HaShem's mercy.

Noach lived in a highly developed society. He saw the world utterly destroyed, and then merited to live after the deluge to experience humanity flourishing once again. Daniel saw the first Temple, its destruction and galut of seventy years, and merited to see the rebuilding of the second Temple. After living the good life, Eyov (Job) experienced the death of all his family, abject poverty and sickness, and then saw his life rebound in all its glory. Today's elderly are living proof and irrefutable testimony that HaShem is the God of Israel and that we are His chosen nation.

Octogenarians of sound mind can tell you what Jewish life was prior to the Second World War. One did not have to be an observant Jew to have been aware of the strength of Torah in Eastern Europe and in most Jewish communities in Moslem lands. The Jewish genius was recognized even by those who hated us for it, and there was a feeling of pride in belonging to the Children of Israel, whose roots went back 3500 years.

Then the heavens fell from their pillars and the Jewish people were engulfed in devastation. When the air cleared in 1945, and we counted our losses, the enormity of the Shoah became unescapably clear. One of every three Jews who were alive on September 1, 1939 was murdered; so that the Jewish people were less than 12 million at the war's end.

Pride turned to shame. The Torah was trampled upon with the destruction of the Torah centers of Europe. The sackcloth replaced the tallit, when it became known that over twelve thousand Jews were murdered daily in the Auschwitz camp alone, not to mention the hundreds of additional slave and death camps the Germans activated all over Europe. And the remnant asked, "Who will and who can resurrect the Jewish spirit to reinforce our belief that we are HaShem's chosen people?"

But the elderly of today join with Noach, Daniel and Eyov in forming a very elite group of Jews who saw the Jewish world brought to its knees, but miraculously spread its wings to gain ever higher levels of Torah and faith in HaShem.

One need not do more than be aware of their presence amongst us, and then realize that the elderly venerable man or woman before you, is living testimony to the living God of Israel.

The miraculous rejuvenation of our nation occurred after the defeat of the German-Amalek with the rebirth of Medinat Yisrael. The greatest proof that the Creator exists, and that the world is determined by His will is the improbable survival and flourishing of the Jewish people, as stated by the prophets.

The younger generation that has not personally witnessed the extreme changes of the last 70-80 years in Jewish history can indulge itself in the false "luxury" of bashing Medinat Yisrael; from the black-garbed Chareidi communities of the galut, some of whom make pilgrimages to the Hitlers of Iran, down to the majority of US Jews under 35 years of age, who reportedly would not feel any great loss if there would not be a Medinat Yisrael!

I suggest that they sit down with the "old folks" and learn from them the wisdom gleaned from personal experience; what it felt like to be a Jew without Medinat Yisrael and what the Medina has contributed to our lives.

Amalek is not a myth. Indeed, he is alive. He is present in Islam and Christianity. He is forever planning, contriving and designing to destroy the Jewish people wherever the Jew might be found: at Ground Zero; in Dearborn, Michigan; in the White House or the U. N., Amalek constitutes an ever-present danger to the Jewish people, regardless of whether the individual Jew is a Torah-observant person or if he is a sworn atheist. The Medina was restored to Am Yisrael to be, among other things, the Noah's ark for our people to survive, and then to thrive, as we had not done for over the last 2000 years of galut.

When my mother was ninety, she told me that, inside, she felt the same as when she was 18! So young men and young women, sit down and glean the wisdom of your "old" 18-year-olds. You will go away a better Jew, and a better person.

Learn the secrets of a meaningful life from those who have gone the distance, those elderly who are a "deposit box" of wisdom and experience. Parashat Be'Chukotai

This parasha is a lesson in crime and punishment. HaShem recalls all, even an inconspicuous blade of grass that grew and dried up in the grasslands of Argentina, and certainly the conduct of an unrepentant sinner.

To remember and not to forget is also a characteristic of the Jewish people. We forever remember our friends and never forget our enemies. It is a command of the Torah to remember the evils of Amalek; but also, to reciprocate to the nations that aided us in our times of strife.

It is a necessary part of Jewish education to learn the history of our people. Who were our ancestors and what did they do to cause the Creator to enter into an eternal covenant with their children whose centerpiece is the holy Torah? What about the wanderings and the return to Eretz Yisrael, where we established the Jewish monarchy, the two Temples and their destruction, followed by our 2000-year exile and return home?

To be aware of our history is to become connected with all our rabbis and kings, saints and soldiers. To forget who we are and from where we came is the "cutting of the ribbon" to the exit door from Judaism.

One small example:

This week I had reason to recall that ten years ago in 2010, our national all-star basketball team trounced the national all-star team of Latvia, winning by 35 points. So what?

At the time when I heard the results on the news, it immediately brought to mind another basketball game in that part of the world. It was held in 1941, between the Lithuanians (who together with Latvia and Estonia comprise the Baltic States) and the occupying German army. Just to refresh your memories, the Baltic peoples are among the most incorrigible anti-Semites that slither on this globe. My mother's "h", who was born in Dvinsk, Latvia at the time when two Torah giants resided there; the "Or Sa'mayach" and the Rogechever Gaon, made a count of 200 of her relatives in Dvinsk and Riga who were murdered by the local Latvians before the Nazi invasion. On the tenth of Tevet, the general Kaddish day, I recite kaddish for the 200 members of my mother's family and the hundreds more of my father's family, who were murdered in the region of Galicia, Poland.

Returning to the basketball game of 1941. The prize that was awarded to every member of the winning team was the opportunity to shoot ten Jews! The events surrounding that basketball game were detailed in a 1948 book by Josef Gar, a Lithuanian, describing how the victorious Lithuanian team herded Jewish residents into a tower, where each player took his turn shooting ten Jews.

This was a little "spark" in time. One incident in the innumerable sadistic acts of evil perpetrated against our people: the winning prize in a basketball game was to shoot Jewish people!

We can and must remember the evils done to us and — prepare for the day of heavenly retribution. Is the **coronavirus** that is attacking Europe, Turkey, Iran and many other of our enemies the beginning of the final chapter in the history of anti-Semitism?

When one considers the evils perpetrated upon us over the generations for which the evildoers will be punished in this world or the next, one

immediately thinks of Germany, Spain, Poland, Russia, as well as Arabs, Romans, Greeks, etc. But these sadists are only a small part of the larger picture.

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 71b) states that any Gentile who causes tza'ar (pain, hardship, embarrassment, ridicule or any emotional distress) to a Jew has perpetrated a capital crime and will be punished accordingly; either in the halachic court of this world or the heavenly court, a bit later.

This is the most powerful expression of HaShem's love for the Jewish people!

"Never Forget and Never Forgive. Retribution will be forthcoming!"

Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

https://www.torahweb.org/torah/2020/parsha/rkoe_behar.html

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Overcoming Natural Instincts - The Ultimate Power Struggle

The Torah says (Behar 25:20-21), "If you will ask what shall we eat in the seventh year if we have not planted or gathered our produce, I will direct my blessing to you (i.e. to your land) in the sixth year, and it will provide for the three-year period." The Torah promises those who observe the laws of shemittah that the land will produce double or triple its normal yield in the sixth year, and that will last until they are able to plant and harvest once again. Why are those who observe shemittah rewarded with such an unnatural occurrence?

The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayikra 1:1) comments:

"The strong warriors (giborei ko'ach) who do Hashem's bidding, to obey the voice of His word (Tehillim 103:20)"...Rav Huna explained in the name of Reb Acha: this refers to Klal Yisrael who said na'aseh before nishma (and thus accepted to perform mitzvos before they heard what their obligation entailed). Reb Yitzchak Nafcha said: this refers to those who observe the laws of shemittah. And why are they called strong warriors? A person sees his field and his trees (being treated as if they are) ownerless, the fences are open, his fruits are being eaten, and he controls himself and does not protest. The Sages teach, "Who is a gibor - a strong person? One who controls his natural temperament. (Avos 4:1)"

The middah of gevurah involves controlling one's natural tendencies. One who overcomes feelings of anger or jealousy, or one who resists an improper desire for physical pleasure demonstrates inner strength. Such behavior is so fundamental to one's avodas Hashem that Rav Yosef Karo chose to begin his Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:1) by alluding to this very idea. He writes, "One should be strong as a lion to rise up in the morning to serve his Creator" - echoing the statement of Reb Yehuda ben Teima (Avos 5:20) that one should be "strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven." One who fights his natural inclination to continue sleeping is as powerful as a strong lion.

The Avos d'Rebbi Nosson (23:1) adds, "There is no one stronger than giborei Torah - the mighty warriors of Torah." Those who study Torah diligently also demonstrate the middah of gevurah. By sacrificing their time, their sleep, and even their financial well-being, they act against human nature. Similarly, the Gemara (Gittin 36b) says, "Those who are shamed but do not embarrass in return, they are insulted but do not respond...about them the posuk says, 'And those who love Him (Hashem) will be like the sun rising in its full strength.' (Shoftim 5:31)" One who resists his desire for retribution is compared to the strength of a rising sun.

When Klal Yisrael said na'aseh v'nishma they were acting against their natural instincts because most people would refuse to accept an undefined obligation. That is why Klal Yisrael are called giborei ko'ach because their statement was an expression of inner strength. And by the same token, those who observe shemittah also demonstrate gevurah by submitting their will to the command of the Torah to allow others to enter their fields during the year of shemittah and take fruits for free.

What is the reward for those who overcome their natural tendencies in order to serve Hashem? They are treated to extraordinary blessing. Chazal comment (Midrash Rabba, Vayeishev 87:8), "The sea split in the merit of Yosef's bones - 'The sea saw and fled (Tehillim 114:3)' in the merit of the one about whom it says, 'And he fled and went outside. (Vayeishev 39:12)'" Hashem performed a miracle and split the sea before Klal Yisrael in the merit of Yosef who acted with superhuman strength when he resisted the wife of Potiphar and he ran outside. One who acts against his nature is repaid with supernatural blessing. Similarly, Chazal say, "One who is not so exacting in the way he deals with others will have his sins forgiven. (Yoma 23a)" If someone overlooks a wrong that he has suffered, then Hashem will also overlook that person's wrongdoings. One who rises above his natural instincts when dealing with others is not judged in heaven by the normal rules.

Perhaps this is why those who observe shemittah are blessed with extra produce during the sixth year. By giving free access to their fields they overcome their natural impulse to act as owners. In return, Hashem promises that in the sixth year the fields will produce much more than their normal yield. The unnatural self-control of those who observe shemittah is rewarded with unusual blessing.

This idea - the importance of controlling one's natural impulses - is especially relevant during the period of Sefiras HaOmer. On Pesach we offer the Korban HaOmer which is made of barley, an animal food (see Sotah 14a), while on Shavuot we bring the Shte HaLechem (two loaves) which are made of wheat, a human food. These korbanos symbolize the inner transformation that the Torah demands of us - to overcome our natural animal instincts for self-satisfaction, and to act instead with restraint and self-control. By observing mitzvos with dedication and discipline, and by interacting with others with humility and self-control, we demonstrate a powerful inner strength, and we make ourselves worthy of extra blessing. More divrei Torah from Rabbi Koenigsberg
More divrei Torah on Parshas Behar
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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Behar – Bechukotai

For the week ending 16 May 2020 / 22 Iyyar 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parsha Insights

Holy Crop Rotation!

"For six years you may sow your field" (25:3)

I still remember learning at school about crop rotation. One year the field would be planted with wheat, the next year with barley or some other crop, and the third it would be left to lie fallow. And then the cycle would begin again.

When reading this week's Torah portion, one could think that the mitzvah of Shemitta, the prohibition of working the fields in the seventh year, is some kind of holy crop rotation. The difference being that in the Torah it says you should work the field for six years and leave it for a seventh. Nothing could be further from the truth.

First, there is evidence that working a field for six straight years and then leaving it for one year does nothing to improve its yield and may even have a negative effect. Second, the Torah prescribes dire punishments for the non-observance of Shemitta. The seventy years of the Babylonian exile were a punishment for seventy non-observed Shemitta years during the 430 years that the Jewish People dwelled in the Land of Israel. We know that G-d's punishment is always measure for measure. If Shemitta was a matter of crop husbandry, how is exile an appropriate punishment? What does exile have to do with the cessation of agriculture in the seventh year? Furthermore, from an agricultural point of view, seventy years without husbandry can have had

no possible benefit for the land. Seventy years of weeds and neglect in no way contribute to the lands rejuvenation, so how is this punishment an appropriate restitution?

To answer these questions we must examine what causes a person to violate Shemitta in the first place.

A great malaise of our own era is the compulsion to overwork. The workaholic defines himself by his job. When you meet someone socially, the question of "What are you?" is usually answered by "I'm a doctor," or "I'm an accountant" or "I'm a rabbi."

There is a fundamental mistake here. What we do is not what we are. In our society we have confused what we do with who we are. The underlying belief revealed here is that the more I work the more I become myself. Violation of the laws of Shemitta comes from a belief that the more I work, the more money will I make, and the more I make, the more I am the master of my own world.

When a person is sent into exile, all the familiar comforting symbols of his success are taken away from him. He realizes that what he does is not who he is. Both his survival and his identity are G-d given gifts. The insecurity of exile brings a person face to face with his total dependence on G-d.

It is from the perspective of exile that a person can rebuild his worldview so that he can see that what he does is not who he is.

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subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

Behar-Bechukotai 5780-2020

"Setting a New Standard of Ethical Behavior"

(Updated and revised from Parashiot Behar-Bechukotai 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week, we once again read two parashiot, Behar and Bechukotai.

In parashat Behar, in Leviticus 25:14, we find the expression, אַל תִּרְגֹּז אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו, Do not aggrieve one another. Then, in Leviticus 25:17, we encounter what seems to be a repetition of the previous verse, וְלֹא תִרְגֹּז אִישׁ אֶת עַמִּיתוֹ, Each of you shall not aggrieve one another.

The rabbis tell us that the first mention of תִּרְגֹּז teaches that it is forbidden to hurt people with words or misleading behavior in business. Whereas, the second mention of וְלֹא תִרְגֹּז applies to personal conduct.

Contemporary society has so dramatically lowered the standards of proper behavior and comportment, that, unfortunately, hurtful words are hardly considered a bad thing. We've reached the absurd point where a children's rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me," dictates much of adult behavior. In other words, hurtful words are routinely accepted, as long as no one is physically harmed.

During his tenure as Mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani, as part of his efforts to reduce crime in the city, developed, with his then police commissioner, what is now known as the "Broken Windows Theory" of criminology. They argued, that if the authorities could early on stop the petty crime, if they could nip the smaller problems in the bud, then there would be much less serious crime. It could be similarly argued, that if society and its educators would teach all citizens the finer essences of life, the so-called "little stuff,"—caring, concern and empathy, then a new tone could be set for our world, where noble aspirations and expectations would invariably increase.

We often hear the expression, "Don't sweat the small stuff"—which is true perhaps for victims. But, perpetrators should never think that it's small stuff. Small stuff is really big stuff.

In fact, we've reached the point where an act of simple kindness or even an act of simple honesty, acts that should be expected as normal and routine, are now considered "extraordinary." How sad that standards and expectations

have been so reduced, because we surely know that small acts of kindness can often have profound impact on people's lives.

I heard a moving story of a young religious man who found someone's personal phone book in a phone booth (must have been a very long time ago!). Because of the Torah mitzvah of הַשְׁבַּת אֵימָתָה —hashavat aveida, of returning lost objects, he started calling the names in the book that he had found, to try to locate its rightful owner. His efforts were unsuccessful until he reached a woman in Florida who told him that she suspected that the phone book might very well be her daughter's. Before getting off the phone, the woman asked the caller why he was so keen to find the rightful owner. He told her that as a religious Jew he felt obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of "hashavat aveida," of returning lost objects.

It turned out that it was indeed the woman's daughter's phone book. The finder and the owner made a date to meet so the woman could retrieve her property. When the young man returned the book to the rightful owner, the woman was overwhelmed by his kindness, far more than would ordinarily be expected. She explained to the young man, "You not only returned my phone book, you returned my mother to me! You see, when I became religiously observant several years ago, my mother was so distraught, that she stopped speaking to me. She thought that I had joined a cult, and felt that everything that I was doing was crazy. My mother was so impressed by the extraordinary effort you made to return my phone book to its rightful owner, that, for the first time, she understood the validity of my lifestyle. As a result of your kindness, we've been reconciled."

No one should be expected to tolerate "sticks and stones" and physical beatings. Judaism, however, goes much further, declaring that society can not tolerate physical violence or hurtful words and bad names.

Judaism, you see, sets a very high standard. It aims for Utopia. And, who knows, maybe because of its high expectations we will actually encounter much more exceptional behavior, and actually experience a taste of the "World to Come," even in this world.

May you be blessed.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Bechukosai :: Out of the Depths

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

This portion contains the tochacha, the stern admonitions and treacherous warnings of what will happen to the Jewish people lest they not observe the Torah. Of course, the prescient predictions of misfortune are preceded with a bounty of blessing if we keep the Torah.

Unfortunately, however, the good comes with the bad, and the unfavorable penalties are not omitted. They are hauntingly clear and undiluted. The Torah details calamity with Divine accuracy. It predicts enemies with foreign tongues will come from foreign lands to capture us. The Torah forewarns that these conquerors will not act like most, to leave the subjugated in their own land. They will, says the Torah, disperse the Jews throughout the entire world. Frightfully, the parsha foreshadows the horrors of the inquisition and Holocaust with descriptions of barbarism, Jews betraying Jews, and mass starvation. The predictions are amazing in their accuracy; and more depressing, we were the victims. It's a very difficult parsha, but the Torah must apprise us about the pain and suffering we will eventually endure.

This essay is in no way attempting to answer why those bad things happened to good people. But two thousand years before the events, the Torah predicts events that are unprecedented in the annals of conquerors and the vanquished. And it happened. Yet the Torah doesn't end it's tochacha only with notes of despair. The strong admonitions close with a promise that, though we will be spread throughout the world we will always yearn for our homeland, feel connected to it, and that an enduring spirit and love for Judaism and our Father in Heaven will never cease. Three thousand years

and countless massacres, crusades, inquisitions later it still works. Pretty powerful.

That would have been a great way to end off quite a depressing portion. It would have even been a wonderful way to end the Sefer VaYikra. But the Torah ends the portion with quite an anticlimactic group of laws.

Immediately after the tochacha, it discusses the laws of erechin. A person has the right to donate his own value or the value of any of his possessions to the Temple. He can declare his home, his animals, even himself as subject to evaluation. Moreover, the Torah assesses a value to any living soul. And that value, whether 30 silver shekels or 50 shekels, is to be donated to the Temple. What connection is the last part of the parsha to the stern and ominous portion that precedes it?

After the Nazis invaded the small village of Klausenberg, they began to celebrate in their usual sadistic fashion. They gathered the Jews into a circle in the center of town, and then paraded their Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusial Yehuda Halberstam, into the center. They began taunting and teasing him, pulling his beard and pushing him around. The vile soldiers trained their guns on him as the commander began to speak. "Tell us Rabbi," sneered the officer, "do you really believe that you are the Chosen People?"

The soldiers guarding the crowd howled in laughter. But the Rebbe did not. In a serene voice, he answered loud and clear, "Most certainly." The officer became enraged. He lifted his rifle above his head and sent it crashing on the head of the Rebbe. The Rebbe fell to the ground. There was rage in the officer's voice. "Do you still think you are the Chosen People?" he yelled. Once again, the Rebbe nodded his head and said, "yes, we are." The officer became infuriated. He kicked the rebbe in the shin and repeated. "You stupid Jew, you lie here on the ground, beaten and humiliated. What makes you think that you are the Chosen People?"

From the depths of humiliation clouded in dust, the Rebbe replied. "As long as we are not the ones kicking and beating innocent people, we can call ourselves chosen."

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the Torah follows the portion of tochacha, the story of Jews kicked and beaten from their homeland, with an even more powerful message. No matter what happens, we have great value as individuals, and as a nation, now and for eternity. Hashem understands that even in the depths of the Diaspora each and every one of us is a great commodity. Lying on the ground, beaten and degraded, a Jewish man, woman, or child can declare his value to the Temple, for no matter how low any nation considers him, G-d values his great worth. And he is considered cherished for eternity. Until the great day when all the nations of the world will also realize the precious value of the tiny nation that dwells amongst them. Good Shabbos

Dedicated in memory of Joseph Michael by Dr. & Mrs. Ernest Goldmann

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Dvar Torah: Behar Bechukotai

Do you know a four lettered Hebrew word comprised of the same four letters?

The answer is וּמ spelling the word 'U'vavo' meaning, 'and his hook'.

I doubt there is a phenomenon of this sort in any other language and I doubt that there is a letter as significant and powerful as the 'ו' in any other language.

Let's look at an example in Parashat Bechukotai. The Torah presents us with the tochacha in which we're told, God forbid, the time could come when the people of Israel, dispersed amongst the nations, would suffer immeasurably.

Hashem then gives us a promise, וזכרתי את בריתי יעקוב, I remember my covenant with Jacob – meaning, God tells us – the Jewish people will live on forever.

Rashi highlights the fact that the name ‘Ya’akov’ in this verse, is spelled with a ו. It’s one of only five occasions in the whole of the bible in which Ya’akov has a ו. He points out that this matches the five occasions on which Eliyahu the prophet is missing a ו at the end of his name.

Rashi tells us that Ya’akov took the ו’s from Eliyahu as collateral, to guarantee that one day, Eliyahu will come to the descendants of Ya’akov to retrieve his ו’s and then in our presence he would herald the arrival of the great messianic era.

Now, why the ו represent all of this? In the concluding Mishnah in Masechet Ediyot, our sages teach us that Eliyahu will come לעשות שלום – ‘to make peace on earth’. The ו is the ultimate coordinating conjunction. It is a symbol of togetherness, of unity and of peace. We know from the book of Shemot, that in the construction of the Mishkan, that וים (hooks) were used. And indeed, in the Torah, the letter ו looks like a hook. The וים were used in order to bring all the elements together to construct one edifice.

That’s the power of the ו, that’s why the middle letter of the Torah is a ו in the word גהון in Parshat Shmini, bringing the two parts together. As is the case with the opening letter of every column of the Torah, with the exception of only five (all for good reasons), starts with a ו, to show that the whole Torah was given as one from Hashem.

So this is the power and significance of the letter ו – and we are finding that it is the prevailing mood and atmosphere within our society right now, as the **coronavirus** sweeps through our countries. In the midst of the tragedy we are seeing a welcome element of unity. People feel connected to one another and at peace.

The reason is obvious! All our societies are being threatened by the same hidden enemy. Let us therefore guarantee that the spirit of the letter ו, this element of togetherness and peace, will prevail well beyond these times. May we witness the coming of the prophet Elijah, followed by the messianic era speedily in our times.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

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Behar-Bechukotai: Ordinary Miracles

Ben-Tzion Spitz

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle. Every cubic inch of space is a miracle. - Walt Whitman

It is human nature to take the commonplace for granted. We are not typically amazed that the sun rises every morning. We are not astounded that objects fall when dropped, obeying the laws of gravity. We are not surprised when we speak and sound comes out of our mouths. It’s the way the world works and we don’t expect it to do otherwise.

The Meshech Chochma on Leviticus 26:4 highlights that, every single aspect of our reality, from the minuscule microbe to the largest galaxies is miraculous and the direct result of divine intervention. What we call nature is nothing other than a continuous stream of miracles that we have become accustomed to.

He adds that part of the “natural” order is that when a person follows God’s commands, he will also receive blessings through “nature.”

So if nature is none other than a continuous series of miracles, then what is the purpose of the more extraordinary miracles which capture our attention? The Meshech Chochma answers that the purpose of the more exciting miracles is exactly to get us to notice that God’s hand is still involved in the world and that in fact, it’s all under His control and direction. God is the composer as well as the ongoing conductor of nature.

That is one of the reasons for the directive to read Psalm 145 (the prayer known as Ashrei) three times every day. Ashrei is composed according to the Alef-Bet. The first verse starts with the letter Alef; the second with Bet; the third with Gimmel, and so on. Each subsequent verse starts with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, a “natural” progression. Both the content and the structure of the Psalm attests to God’s dictating and managing “nature.” Therefore, the Talmud states (Tractate Berachot 4b) that whoever recites Psalm 145 three times a day is assured a place in the World-to-Come. By giving continuous testimony and declaring our consistent belief in God’s constant presence in nature, our spirits become suitably prepared for a continuous attachment to God after our time in the physical world. May we appreciate all the miracles in our lives, the mundane, the commonplace, the subtle and the extraordinary, and always give thanks.

Dedication - To the (finally) new Israeli government.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Behar-Bechukosai

פרשת בהר-בחוקותי תשפ

Behar

וידבר ד' אל משה בהר סיני לאמר

And Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai saying. (25:1)

Hashem spoke to Moshe *Rabbeinu* on *Har Sinai* concerning the laws of *Shemittah*, the Sabbatical/seventh year. *Rashi* asks: Why *Shemittah*? How is *Shemittah* linked to Sinai? He explains that the Torah is teaching us that just like *Shemittah* is detailed with rules and fine points, likewise, this applies to all *mitzvos*; their rules and details were taught to them at that time as well. The laws of *Shemittah* were not repeated again prior to the Jews’ entrance into the Land. As such, everything took place at Sinai, with *Shemittah* serving as the exemplar, prototype, for all other *mitzvos*. Is this lesson so vital to our observance of *mitzvos* that the Torah underscores the fact that the minutiae of details of the *mitzvos* heralds back to Sinai? Furthermore, to cite the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh*, why is *Shemittah* selected, as opposed to any other *mitzvah*, to demonstrate this fact?

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, explains that the lesson for us is that we have maintained the same degree of sanctity upon hearing the details of the *mitzvah* as we had when we heard its general principles. Sometimes we hear a general concept and we agree, accept and are prepared to move forward with execution until we hear the details, the nitty gritty, daily demands. *Klal Yisrael* did not flinch when they heard the details. Why is this so important?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* offers a number of citations which emphasize the significance of incorporating the Revelation, the moment when we received the Torah at Sinai, into our daily learning. *V’hodaatam levanecha v’livnei vancha...yom asher amadatam lifnei Hashem Elokecha b’Chorev*. “And you shall teach it to your children and to your grandchildren...the day upon which you stood before Hashem, your G-d, in Chorev.” We are to incorporate that feeling of awe, trembling and quaking into our Torah study. (*Berachos* 12a) “Each day the Torah shall be (as) new in your eyes” (*Rashi, Devarim* 26:16). The Torah should always appear to us as a gift which everyone seeks to possess and enjoy.

Rashi writes that this “newness” should be our attitude towards the manner in which we relate to *mitzvah* observance. In other words, *mitzvah* observance should be exciting, invigorating, ideal. The problem is: How does one inject this flavor, this life, into something he has done a thousand times? Is it realistic to expect someone to maintain the same attitude on his 1001st time as he had the very first time he carried out the *mitzvah*?

Rav Alpert quotes the *Chazon Ish*, זל, who posits that if each time one performs a *mitzvah*, he does so with the complete intention of fulfilling its every detail, then each time he performs that *mitzvah* it will be as if it was his very first time – as if he had just been commanded regarding its observance.

We now understand the significance of *Shemittah* and why it was (possibly) selected as the *mitzvah* to emphasize detail and newness. *Shemittah* is replete with detail. Furthermore, *Shemittah* is a once in seven-year *mitzvah*. The average Jew probably will not have the *Shemittah* experience more than ten times in his life. Thus, each cycle will present itself as something exceedingly new and novel, something for which he has been waiting for the past six years. We are instructed to view each and every *mitzvah* as we view *Shemittah*, the uncommon, wait-for-six-years *mitzvah*. As the *Chazon Ish* teaches, the key is to view each *mitzvah* as being so special, so precious, that we want to be in the proper frame of mind to carry it out meticulously, with extreme care, paying attention to every detail as if we were performing it for the very first time.

שש שנים תזרע שדך... ובשנה השביעית שבת שבתון יהיה לארץ

For six years you may sow your field... But the seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land. (25:3,4)

The *mitzvah* of *Shemittah* teaches us that Hashem rules the universe. He is the only force in the universe, not the laws of nature. By allowing his field to remain untended and unguarded, the Jew declares to the world that life is not about material bounty. When Hashem says, “Stop,” we halt our work, our production – whether it is *Erev Shabbos* or *Shemittah*. We ascribe to a Higher Power, and we believe with complete faith that Hashem will provide for our needs. During the *Shemittah* year, all of the produce of that year is *hefker*, free for all to take; we have no restrictions. Why is it necessary to have our produce become *hefker*? It would have been sufficient simply not to produce, allow the field to remain fallow. If something grows anyway, why should the owner not keep it?

I once heard that *Shemittah* teaches us selflessness. It is not all (only) about us. There are other people in the world. A community is comprised of many individuals: some the same; others different; but we are all in this together. We must learn to place another Jew’s interests – if not above our own – at least on par with our concerns. When it has to do with emotions, amenities and the various comforts of life, we are directed to act selflessly and put the feelings and needs of others before our own (unless it is a matter of life, then, *chayecha kodmin*, your life takes precedence).

Why do we find it so challenging to place our fellow’s interests above – or at least on par with – our own? Private ownership. When man owns a parcel of property or any material possession, he claims complete mastery over this possession. It is “his,” and no one can touch it. We do not want anyone to meddle in our businesses, our affairs, because they belong to “me.” While we are comfortable being part of a community, a settlement, a family, when it involves private ownership – stay out! The “private” is the great divide between people. This attitude ultimately leads to an exclusionary, isolationist view on life.

The flipside of private ownership is initiative and incentive for personal achievement. We develop what is our own. We do not care to develop what belongs to someone else. Why toil for someone else?

The Torah presents us with an alternative to the negative aspect of private ownership: *Shemittah*. For six years you may – should – work. For six years it is your initiative, your incentive, your success. The sense of acquisition and domination is very real during those six years – but do not get ahead of yourself, because the seventh year is coming. The flipside/alternative is *Shemittah*. We, who have previously been private owners, now surrender our ownership. As a result, we develop a greater sense of fellowship, because now we have placed our fellow’s interests above our own. The self-imposed walls of private enterprise which have separated us from the community have been demolished. Selfishness gives way to altruism and magnanimity; narrow-mindedness concedes to tolerance and impartiality. During *Shemittah*, all Jews were equal, No one owned; no

one controlled; no one manipulated. We were as we were meant to be: one people, without dividers between us; Jewish landowners working to develop, and hopefully maintain, a balanced perspective of life. *Shemittah* was when the individual realized that he was part of a larger community of Jews, in which all were equal.

I saw an exposition applying this idea of *Shemittah* inclusiveness to explain what at first glance appears as an ambiguous statement in *Pirkei Avos* (5:13), He who says, ‘What is mine is mine and what is yours is yours’ – this is a *middah beinonis*, ordinary/average; but some say this is *middas Sodom*.” This is extreme. Just because a person wants to keep for himself – what is mine is mine and what is yours is yours – is he similar to the people of Sodom who warranted being destroyed? Yes, he thinks only of himself – never of others. Such a person will never experience a feeling of selflessness. He will be consumed by his selfishness, to the point that if anyone attempts to break through the wall, he will respond negatively. Life is all about him, with no allowance for anyone else. Indeed, why would he be called ordinary or average, unless he represents the contemporary human psyche.

Bechukosai

ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם ונתנה הארץ יבולה ועץ השדה יתן פריו

Then I will provide your rains in their time and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit. (26:4)

“Rains in their time” means the time most convenient for people – such as Friday nights when people are generally at home or close by. When we get “wet,” it is for a reason. Hashem defrays anything that might prove to be a nuisance from inconveniencing us. The *Midrash*, however, adds that, at times, an entire community or even a city might have rain in the merit of one person who needs the benefit it provides. *Chazal* go so far as to posit that, at times, Hashem may send rain for the benefit of one field, even one blade of grass. We neither know nor understand Hashem’s ways, because we are not privy to everything – past, present or future – that factors into a Heavenly decision. Thus, concerning Heavenly knowledge and Divine power, nothing stands in the way of sending an entire rain shower for the benefit of one meritorious person.

Horav Avraham Pam, זל (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in “Messages From Rav Pam”), gleans from this *Midrash* (*Vayikra Rabbah* 35:12) an insight that should serve as a source of encouragement and *chizuk* for *mechanchim*, educators. (In truth, as representatives of Heaven on this world, every Jew is a *mechanech* by personal example. Every parent is certainly a *mechanech*.) One has moments in his career (we have all experienced this feeling) in which he works, toils, sweats, prepares, puts all of his life into his *talmidim*, students, but does not see the fruits of his labors. He/she wonders what it is that he/she is doing that is wrong. Something is just not working. Weeks can pass, and the *rebbe/morah* feel that he/she is just not reaching the students. How are they to be molded into Torah loyal Jews if their mentors cannot get through to them? The next point of the downward spiral is to give up. “Is it really worth it? Does it make sense to toil to the point of exhaustion, expend blood, sweat and tears in this school, for this class? (As Rav Pam underscores, the sacrifice is that much greater and the challenge and obstacles are that much more difficult in an out of town school, far from the major *yeshivah* Torah communities). When the teacher/*rebbe/morah* asks the critical question: “Am I making a difference in the lives of these children?” one should begin to worry about the *rebbe/morah*’s viability in Torah *chinuch*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the answer is to be found in the above-quoted *Midrash*, which teaches that it is worthwhile for Hashem to bring rain for an entire field, when, in fact, He only wants to irrigate one blade of grass. A *rebbe* can teach an entire class and, at the end of the day, only one student will go through the system, *yeshivah*, *kollel* and become a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, whose erudition impacts thousands. (I add that it does not mean that the rest of the class was not “successful.” Every Jewish child who studies Torah is a success. Some, however, apply that Torah to disseminate it to others (*lilmod u’le’lamed*.) From a Torah-productive perspective, this is meaningful in the sense that the Torah is

transmitted and continued. It molds and shapes the student's life. Furthermore, this budding *talmid chacham* has a direct influence on his family: father, mother and siblings. All of this has been achieved through the efforts of the *mechanech*.

I would like to expound on this idea. A *rebbe* can have a class of boys who are, for the most part, doing well. They may not be performing in accordance with the high expectations of the *rebbe*, but they are listening, learning and observing. One boy in the class might be more challenging than the others. His family background might gravitate more to being observant, but not passionately so. As a result of the *rebbe's* influence, the boy becomes more observant, with stronger and greater devotion to *shemiras ha'mitzvos*. Along the way, he *shleps* his father along. In an attempt to assuage and encourage her son's newly-found attitude, the mother changes her own level of observance. When the parents change, the home/siblings change. In the space of a few years, an entire family is transformed: parents, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. All of this is the result of a *rebbe* who cared. One blade of grass – one *Yiddische neshamah* – an entire family – generations of *Yiddishkeit*. There is not one *mechanech* that has not impacted the life of “one” student, and, as a result, transformed a family!

או אז יכנע לבבם הערל

Then at last shall their obstructed heart be subdued. (26:41)

Parashas Bechukosai contains within it the first *Tochacha*, Rebuke/curses, whose purpose is to teach *mussar*, ethical direction, reproof, in order to inspire them to wake up and repent. This is alluded to by the above *pasuk*: the rebuke/curses will liberate them from the fetters of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. Additionally, rebuke is a good thing - in that it assures us that Hashem cares. *Horav Yisrael Belsky*, zl, explains that a child who misbehaves knows that he is in for a punishment when his parents become aware of his misdeed. What if they ignore it, ignore him? This implies that they do not care; they have rejected him. Indeed, rejection is far worse than punishment, because rejection conveys the message: We have given up on you. Do what you want. It no longer makes a difference to us.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that *yissurim*, suffering, troubles, is a vehicle through which Hashem communicates with us. Sadly, we view *yissurim* negatively, contending that if Hashem loves us, He will not give us pain. This is the attitude of someone who is not thinking. When a person commits a wrong he must be punished, so that he will not continue acting inappropriately. What if the person does not know (or refuses to acknowledge) that what he has done is wrong? He must be told; the wrong must be pointed out to him, so that he can contemplate the error of his ways and correct them. By focusing on the *yissurim* that he experiences, he will be able to identify what it was that he did wrong and purge the evil that catalyzed his negative behavior. When one's actions are recalcitrant, his behavior fractious, he should set his sights on determining the source of the problem.

Suffering is an indication that Hashem believes in the person's ability to correct his error and move on spiritually. It also shows the abiding love Hashem manifests, remembering each one of us and doing what is necessary to curb transgression and spur growth. As *Rav Belsky* observes, Hashem personally attends to the smallest details in every individual Jew's personal life and His nation, collectively, constantly sending a stream of messages and opportunities to enable and encourage us to achieve perfection. This is the meaning of *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence.

Our function is to believe, to trust in Hashem with unstinting faith that whatever happens is His message, His way of showing love and concern. *Bitachon*, trust, is the key to life. Some have it; others must work on it constantly until they have achieved the peace of mind that comes with total faith in Hashem. By doing this, we will learn to lead our lives in constant reliance on the Almighty, which is really what living as a Jew means: unswerving commitment to Hashem. I close with the words of *Horav Nachman Breslover*, zl, “Do not relate to Hashem about all the suffering that you are experiencing. Instead, tell your troubles that there is a Creator.” (In

other words, ameliorate your suffering with the knowledge that Hashem is present to support you – if you take the time to listen to the message.)

Indeed, accepting the message with love, and not balking as a result of the pain, is the test which defines one's bond with Hashem. We all experience challenges in the course of our lives, challenges which are commensurate with our ability to withstand and triumph over them. Hashem will not test us with a test that we are destined to fail (out of weakness). The following story is about a Jew whose love for Hashem was boundless, who remained unstintingly committed despite being challenged – and challenged again. Indeed, his attitude was, “Hashem, whatever You throw at me, I am ready.”

In one of the premier European communities, a couple resides who waited twenty years for their only child. The husband serves as *Ram*, lecturer, in one of the community's *yeshivos*; his wife is a successful teacher in the local Bais Yaakov. For twenty years, they hoped, they prayed, they retained their calm demeanor. Such was their unwavering commitment, their consummate love for the Almighty. (Incidentally, the wife did conceive twice and gave birth to infants that lived a mere few days.) Not only did they not despair, they would visit with other couples who, like themselves, were still waiting for their first child. They encouraged them, imbuing them with hope. Nothing was beyond Hashem, “Look, after almost twenty years of waiting, we have not given up hope: we wait; we pray; we believe.”

Hashem responded positively to their prayers, and a wonderful, beautiful baby boy was born to them. The *bris* was more like a wedding. The entire city shared in their unbridled joy. The couple moved on to parenthood, raising their son in the Torah way. He possessed a brilliant mind and devoted himself to a life of Torah study. He passed many milestones in his Torah achievement as he matured into an exemplary G-d-fearing young man, replete with Torah knowledge, *middos tovos*, extraordinary positive character traits, and completely devoted to mitzvah observance and performing acts of loving kindness. Obviously, *shadchanim*, matchmakers, lined up at his front door with proposals of wonderful girls from outstanding families who were willing to support this young man in a manner that would allow him to study Torah full - time for as long as he desired. He ended up becoming engaged to a special, fine young lady from a background similar to his own. It was a match made in Heaven. Finally, after years of prayer and hope, the parents were seeing their “pay day.” The engagement celebration paralleled the celebration rendered for the *chosson's bris*. Unfortunately, the joy that permeated the community lasted for only a few days – when the *chassan* began to complain of severe, painful headaches. He was rushed to the hospital where, after testing, the grim prognosis was confirmed: he was suffering from a terminal disease, with mere weeks to live.

The average parent who hears such shocking news would understandably fall apart, complain, grieve, pray. The reaction of this young man's parents was to strengthen themselves with faith and trust in the Almighty. What Hashem does is for the good. Who are we to argue? These were the same parents whose faith during twenty years of childlessness remained resolute. As soon as they learned the frightful news, they knocked on the door of their new *mechutanim*, parents of their son's *kallah*, with the news and their proposal, “We do not want your daughter to suffer for even one day. We have come to revoke the match. Our son agrees. He does not want such a special girl to experience the pain of loss.”

The *mechutanim* wept. The *kallah*, who at that moment was in another room, also wept. After a few moments, the *kallah* came out of her room and spoke, “I refuse to break the *shidduch*. Such a young man, who is the consummate *ben Torah*, is rare. I pray along with everyone in the community that my *chassan* be cured.” It was decided the entire community would storm the Heavens on behalf of the *chosson*.

A few days later, the individual who related this story was walking past one of the small *shtieblach* (*shuls*) in the community when he heard bitter weeping emanating from within the *shtiebel*. He went inside to see if anyone was in need of assistance. He noticed a man standing in front of the

Aron Kodesh, crying bitterly. As he came closer he became aware of the man's identity: he was the *chosson's* father.

"My Father, my loving Father," he cried. "You must believe me when I assert that I have no grievance against You. Whatever my wife and I have received from You until now has always been kindness. Nothing that You will do to me will cause my faith to weaken or my love to diminish. I will remain steadfast in my love and devotion to You. The bonds that we have developed with You are as strong as ever. They will never be torn asunder. Indeed, no matter what occurs, I will devote myself even more to Your service.

"If, by some miracle, my son lives, we will do everything within our means to enable him to spend his life studying Torah. Nothing will stand in our way to provide for him."

The listener was all shaken up by what he had just seen and heard. Word spread. They knew that their friend (the father of the *chosson*) was a devout, G-d-fearing Jew, but were never aware of his extraordinary faith in Hashem. That *Shabbos*, the *Rav* addressed the congregation, "We have in our midst an individual of unique spiritual character. It behooves us all to help him in his time of need. Every one of us must repair our inter-relationships, elevate and sanctify our lives, dedicate ourselves with greater fervor to the service of Hashem through Torah study and *tefillah*, prayer. Let it all be a *z'chus*, merit, for the *refuah sheleimah*, full recovery, of the *chosson*." Everyone listened and immediately acted. The community was transformed. Within days, one could hardly recognize its members. To listen to them *davening Shacharis*, the morning prayer, one would think that it was *Neilah*, the *Yom Kippur* closing prayer. They were all on a mission to intercede and catalyze the *chosson's* return to good health.

A few days passed, and the *chosson* went in for a PET scan to determine the status of the growth invading his brain. The doctors looked at the scan and called the chief of medicine, who was just as perplexed as they were. The growth had disappeared as if it had never been there. The chief of medicine told the *chosson* and his parents that the only explanation for this phenomenon was: Heavenly intervention, a miracle! When one has true faith, it is a reality in which he believes on a regular basis. Everyone came together to pray for a miracle for the life of a young man whose entire existence was miraculous.

Va'ani Tefillah

מודים אנחנו לך... על חיינו המסורים בידך – *Modim anachnu lach...Al chayeinu ha'mesurim b'yadecha*. We gratefully thank You... for our lives ...which are in Your hands.

Bircas Hodaah, the blessing of Thanksgiving, is the eighteenth blessing. It is very appropriately placed, because 18/*chai*/life implies that the purpose of your life is to recognize Hashem's kindnesses and to thank Him for it by serving Him in the manner that He so directed us. Yet, we allow this overriding purpose of life to elude us, when, in fact, without life, we could neither sin nor go about our lives as we please. We live life as if we deserve it, taking for granted that life is the greatest Heavenly gift that we can receive. It is one thing not to pay gratitude, but how can one have the audacity to abuse the very gift that he receives by taking that gift and using it against our Heavenly Benefactor? If we would take the time to focus on the far-reaching meaning of *Modim*, what and why we are thanking – we would act differently to the point that our obligation to say *Modim* would serve as a deterrent from sin.

Dedicated in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum

ולגיגה אהובה בת הרב דניאל ע"ה ל"ו אייר תשנ"א

"תנו לה מפרי ידה ויהללה בשערי מנעשה"

by her extended Schur family

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The Origins of a Siyum?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Friday Finish

May I make a siyum on a Friday?

Question #2: Biblical Finish

May I use a siyum on a book of Tanach to avoid fasting on erev Pesach?

Question #3: No One Finished

A *chaburah* of which I am a member is completing a *mesechta* in the Nine Days. Everyone of us has missed the *shiur* at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire *mesechta*. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?

Introduction:

At the end of this week's double *parshiyos* of Behar and Bechokosai, we celebrate the siyum of the completion of another *chumash* of the Torah. Since, unfortunately, most of us have been unable to hear the reading of the Torah, I thought it would be a good time to reflect on the halachic background of making a siyum.

Several Talmudic and Midrashic passages serve as sources for the *simcha* and celebration appropriate for completing an important learning project or other *mitzvah* activity. As always, our goal is not to issue halachic rulings for any individual; that is the role of each individual's *rav* or *posek*. Our purpose is to provide educational, halachic background on the topic at hand.

The most obvious Talmudic passage about the concept of siyum on studying Gemara is a quotation in which Abayei stated, I will be rewarded because whenever I heard that one of our young Torah scholars completed a *mesechta*, I made a *seudah* for all the other scholars (*Shabbos* 118b). As Rashi explains, Abayei was the *rosh yeshiva* and made a siyum for his *yeshiva* when one of his *talmidim* completed a *mesechta*.

Shehasimcha bi'me'ono

The Maharshah considers a siyum *mesechta* such a great celebration that he writes that the introduction of the *bensching* after the *seudah* in its honor should warrant the addition of the words *shehasimcha bi'me'ono*, "that this celebration is in His Presence." We usually recite this passage only at a wedding or at a *sheva brachos*. The Maharshah, however, felt that a siyum and a *pidyon haben* also warrant this recital. His reasoning is straightforward:

The Gemara (*Kesubos* 8a) cites a dispute whether *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* is recited at a *bris*, concluding that it is not recited for an interesting reason. Since, at a *bris*, the child suffers some pain, we should not imply that it is a moment of *simcha* for everyone in attendance. The Maharshah reasons that a siyum is a greater celebration than a *bris*, because all the participants are *be'simcha*. A similar line of reasoning may be applied to a *pidyon haben*. As a result, we should recite *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* when *bensching* after either of these *smachos*.

We actually find this issue discussed earlier than the Maharshah, who lived in sixteenth-century Poland. The Abudraham, who lived in Spain during the thirteenth century, cites an opinion that one should recite *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* at a *pidyon haben*, but he rejects this for the following reason: Sometimes, there could be a very tragic situation in which the *pidyon haben* is performed after the infant has died, in which case there would not be a *simcha*, but additional grief for the parents, and, as a result, no recital of *shehasimcha bi'me'ono*. (Explaining this halachic scenario requires a lengthy discussion of the laws of *pidyon haben*, which is not the topic of this article.) Since this situation can happen, it was decided never to recite *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* at a *pidyon haben*.

The Abudraham does not discuss whether we should recite *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* at the *bensching* of a siyum. Standard practice is not to recite *shehasimcha bi'me'ono* after either a siyum or a *pidyon haben*. The likely reason for this practice is that there is a difference between a *seudas mitzvah* that is also a *simchas mitzvah*, such as those celebrating a wedding, a *bris* or a *sheva brachos*, and a *seudas mitzvah* that does not qualify as a *simchas*

mitzvah, such as a meal celebrating a bar mitzvah, siyum or pidyon haben. Although the meals served in celebration of a siyum and a pidyon haben are seudos mitzvah, and, according to some opinions, a seudas bar mitzvah is also, none of these qualify as a simchas mitzvah. The recital of shehasimcha bi'me'ono is appropriate for a simchas mitzvah, not a seudas mitzvah. There are other differences affected by whether an event qualifies as a seudas mitzvah or also as a simchas mitzvah. For example, an aveil may not attend a simchas mitzvah, and therefore he is precluded from attending a wedding or sheva brachos. However, he is permitted to attend a seudas mitzvah, and, for this reason, he may attend a siyum, and, according to most authorities, a pidyon haben.

Another source for a siyum

Returning to our theme of a siyum for completing a learning project, here is a second source for the practice of celebrating the achievement of a mitzvah.

When the construction of the Beis Hamikdash was completed, the celebration lasted for fourteen consecutive days. The Gemara notes that this celebration was so significant that Yom Kippur was not observed that year in Yerushalayim, since they were all celebrating the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash (Moed Katan 9a). How can a celebration be so important that they actually ate in its honor on Yom Kippur?

That this celebration superseded fasting on Yom Kippur was derived from a kal ve'chomer. When the mishkan was dedicated, for the first twelve days, private korbanos of each of the nesi'im were offered (Bamidbar Chapter 7), which means that some of these korbanos were offered on Shabbos. Yet, we know that korbanos of an individual never supersede Shabbos. The only possible conclusion to be reached is that dedicating the mishkan was so important that it superseded Shabbos.

Dedicating the Beis Hamikdash has greater significance than the dedication of the mishkan, since the Beis Hamikdash was a permanent structure. And since Shabbos, which is holier than Yom Kippur, was superseded by the celebration of the dedication of the mishkan, certainly proper celebration of the Beis Hamikdash supersedes Yom Kippur. Since observing the fast on Yom Kippur would take away from the immense simcha and celebration involved in inaugurating the Beis Hamikdash, the fast of Yom Kippur was set aside that year!

Obviously, celebrating the inauguration of the Beis Hamikdash is a much greater simcha than a siyum on a mesechta, or even the siyum hashas of all the daf yomi shiurim around the world. Nevertheless, this Gemara conveys the value of completing a mitzvah, which includes the completion of a learning project.

A third source

Yet another source for the festivity of a siyum is based on the following passage of Gemara (Taanis 31a). There the reason provided for the gala festival of the 15th of Av was because it was the annual date on which Klal Yisroel completed chopping the wood necessary for the Beis Hamikdash. Since this was the culmination of a long mitzvah, finishing it every year required a major celebration, similar to completing the Torah (Tosafos Yom Tov, Taanis 4:8).

We should note that this event was celebrated by the entire community, not only by those who actually participated in chopping, gathering and processing the wood. In the same spirit, the Maharshal writes that it is a mitzvah to participate in a siyum, even if you did not participate in the learning (Yam shel Shlomoh, Bava Kama 7:37; see also Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 444:9).

This reminds me of an observation that I heard many times from my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Ruderman, that when one person completed Shas in a town in Eastern Europe, it was commonplace that the entire town wore their Shabbos clothes that day – to demonstrate their happiness that the town now boasted another Jew who had completed Shas!

Simchas Torah

The tremendous rejoicing of Simchas Torah is also an extension of this idea, since we are celebrating that we have completed a cycle of reading the Torah (Or Zarua and Hagahos Ashri, end of Sukkah). In earlier generations, this

included inviting the entire community to a festive meal, sponsored by the chassan Torah, in which fine delicacies were served (ibid.).

For this reason, I know that some gedolim emphasize that hashkafah droshos on Simchas Torah should not discuss future commitments to learning – the goal on Simchas Torah is to celebrate what has been accomplished, and discussing future commitments detracts from the celebration!

On the other hand, this creates a question: At the time of the Gemara, there were different customs regarding how often the reading of the Torah was completed (Megillah 29b). Today, it is universally accepted that we complete the Torah reading every year; but at the time of the Gemara, there were communities that completed the Torah only every three years, or three-and-a-half years (twice in a shemittah cycle), as explained by the Maharshal (Kol chilukei dinim... #48, printed in Yam shel Shlomoh after mesechta Bava Kama).

Notwithstanding that those following this custom did not complete the Torah annually, the Gemara (Megillah 31a) teaches that the reading for Simchas Torah begins with Vezos Habracha, the last parsha of the Torah. For those communities that read the entire Torah every year, the reading of Vezos Habracha is very appropriate on Simchas Torah, because this is the day that the annual reading of the Torah is completed. But why did those who completed the Torah reading only every three years read Vezos Habracha on Simchas Torah -- they were only a third of the way through the cycle of reading the Torah?

This question is raised by the Meshech Chachmah (end of Vezos Habracha), who provides a fascinating answer to the question.

There are two different reasons why we read Vezos Habracha on Simchas Torah:

(1) Because it completes our reading of the Torah.

(2) Because the beginning of parshas Vezos Habracha alludes to the fact that Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah from Hashem sight unseen, whereas the other nations rejected the Torah (Rashi at the beginning of Vezos Habracha).

This symbolism is reflected in the offerings of the bulls as public korbanos in the Beis Hamikdash on Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres, the latter being the same Yom Tov as Simchas Torah. (In Eretz Yisroel, this one day Yom Tov is universally called Simchas Torah.) Cumulatively, through the seven days of Sukkos, we offer seventy bulls, one for each of the nations of the earth.

On Simchas Torah, we offer only one bull, which represents the unique relationship that Klal Yisroel has with Hashem (Rashi at the end of parshas Pinchas). For this reason, Vezos Habracha is an appropriate reading for Simchas Torah, even in places where they did not complete the reading of the Torah that day, since it commemorates the special relationship that exists between Hashem and the Jewish people, which we celebrate enthusiastically on Simchas Torah. (See also the Collected Writings of Rav Hirsch, Volume III, page 106, where he explains the celebration of Simchas Torah in a similar way.)

A fourth source

Returning to the gala festivities associated with a siyum, another Midrash is quoted as a source for this celebration. The posuk reports that when Hashem appeared to Shlomoh Hamelech in a dream and offered him his preference for a present, Shlomoh requested wisdom. Upon awaking he discovered that he had now been given colossal understanding. He then went to Yerushalayim, stood near the aron of Hashem, brought many korbanos to thank Hashem for his new knowledge and made a party for the entire nation to join in his celebration. The Midrash concludes that this teaches that we should make a seudah upon attainment of a Torah milestone (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 1:9).

Fridays

At this point, we can discuss our opening question: "May I make a siyum on a Friday?"

Allow me to explain the question: The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 249:2) prohibits having a fancier meal on Friday than is usual, because this takes away from the honor due Shabbos. The Rema contends that a bris or a

pidyon haben that falls on a Friday is an exception to this rule and can be observed on Friday, which, he notes, is the accepted custom.

What about a siyum on a Friday

In a note that is all of four words long, the Biur Halacha (249:2 s.v. Oh) writes that, just as a bris or a pidyon haben may be celebrated on a Friday, so may a siyum. Presumably, he feels that the celebration of a siyum should not be delayed, even to complete the learning until Shabbos or Sunday, in order to celebrate it in a timely fashion.

However, other authorities disagree with the Biur Halacha's conclusion, contending that the completion of the learning should, indeed, be delayed in order to avoid holding the siyum on Friday, noting that even regarding a pidyon haben, not all authorities agreed with the Rema's conclusion to hold it on Friday (Ketzos Hashulchan 69:7 in Badei Hashulchan). (We should note that an early authority, the Maharam Mintz, ruled that you can delay the completion of a mesechta to an appropriate time that you wish to celebrate, and complete the mesechta at that time [cited by Shach, Yoreh Deah 246:27].)

Tanach or Mishnah?

At this point, we can discuss the second of our opening questions: "May I use a siyum on a book of Tanach to avoid fasting on erev Pesach?" In other words, completing what type of learning project qualifies as a siyum? The halachic authorities discuss this question in the following contexts. Does attending such a siyum exempt a firstborn from fasting on erev Pesach? Does it permit people to eat meat or drink wine during the Nine Days? These questions are discussed by several halachic authorities, among whom I found the following rulings:

The Pnei Yehoshua (Brochos 17a) understands that when Rabbi Yochanan, the amora, completed studying the book of Iyov, he made a seudas siyum, similar to that made when completing a mesechta. This implies that completing a book of Tanach qualifies as a siyum, but it does not teach us to what depth it must be studied, since Rabbi Yochanan certainly studied Iyov in great depth.

Some rule that someone who has a proper seder studying a book of navi may celebrate a siyum on erev Pesach, even if it is a small sefer, and may use it as a basis to avoid fasting. However, if he was studying it primarily to be able to avoid the fast, he may rely on such a siyum only if he studied a large sefer of Tanach, but not a small one (Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shelomoh #386). Others rule that one can use a book of navi as a siyum for these purposes only if it was studied in depth (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim #157).

We should also note that the Elyah Rabbah (551:26) rules that you should not speed up or slow down your learning in order to use a siyum as a reason to eat meat during the Nine Days. The Elyah Rabbah also suggests that, if this individual does not usually make a siyum when he completes a mesechta, he may not make a siyum during the Nine Days for the purpose of allowing people to eat fleishig.

No one finished

At this point, we can discuss the third of our opening questions: "A chaburah of which I am a member is completing a mesechta in the Nine Days.

Everyone of us has missed the shiur at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire mesechta. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?"

Many authorities quote a passage of Gemara (Bava Basra 121b) and the commentary of Rashbam thereon to demonstrate that this is a valid siyum. There the Gemara explains that the immense celebration associated with the 15th of Av was because this was the date when the chopping and gathering of the wood used in the Beis Hamikdash was completed every year. These authorities note that it was not one individual, nor even one group that participated in this holy and extensive project, but it was a large, joint effort completed by the last group on that date. This approach allows us to answer the third of our opening questions: "A chaburah of which I am a member is completing a mesechta in the Nine Days. Everyone of us has missed the shiur at times, so none of us has actually completed the entire mesechta. Can we eat meat when we celebrate this siyum together?"

Rav Reuven Margaliyos explains why this qualifies as a valid siyum, even though no individual finished the entire mesechta. He compares it to the following two halachic concepts. First, there is a halachic principle that when two people together perform a melacha that each could not do on his own, they are culpable as if each performed the melacha by himself. This halachic concept is called zeh einu yochol ve'zeh einu yochol. Rav Margaliyos notes that if this provides sufficient reason to make someone culpable, it certainly qualifies as a reason to benefit, because of the halachic principle of merubah midah tovah mimidas pur'anus, that a positive attribute is greater than something harsh (see Yoma 76a et al).

A second proof rallied by Rav Margaliyos is the halacha that if two people own a bull together that kills someone, both owners are obligated to pay the kofer, the atonement money, as if they were the sole owner. Thus, we see that a financial obligation can be created by my being part of a group. If so, it is certainly true that I can celebrate something that was accomplished by a group (Nefesh Chayah, Orach Chayim 551:10, quoted in Daf al Daf).

Conclusion

From all the above, we see the beauty and celebration that is associated with completing a large mitzvah project, and particularly, the achievement of completing a siyum after studying something in appropriate depth. I wish everyone my brochos of cheilecha le'oraysa, always use your strengths and talents to study and observe the Torah!